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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a discussion of three problem areas that were delineated during the course of a field test designed to assess the effects of the "Heartsmart Adventures," an interpersonal skills curriculum developed from the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO) Theory as described by William C. Schutz. Students and teachers from seven fourth-grade classrooms from different schools within a large metropolitan area participated as experimental subjects during the field test. Data were derived from analysis of responses given to questionnaire and interview items by both teachers and students and from observation schedules completed on all classrooms on a regular basis. The three problem areas that were defined are: (1) misinterpretation of program objectives; (2) role confusion, and (3) socio-emotional conflict. Probable causal factors for the problem areas and the solution strategies employed to help alleviate or eliminate these factors during the program revision process are described. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings for developers, evaluators, implementers, and users of affective education programs. (Author/MJB)

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Problematic Issues Related to the Systematic Teaching of Affective Skills

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Three problem areas were delineated during the course of a field test designed to assess the effects of an interpersonal skills curriculum. Presented in this paper is a discussion of these problem areas, their probable causes, and the solution strategies applied to the program during the revision process to help prevent or alleviate their future occurence. Guidelines are discussed which may assist developers, evaluators, implementers, and users of affective education programs.

Program Description

Since 1974, Research for Better Schools, under contract with the National Institute of Education, has been engaged in the conceptualization, development, and testing of a course of instruction, The Heartsmart Adventures, designed to enhance interpersonal skills among fourth grade children. The goals of the program were derived from the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO) Theory as described by William C. Shutz (1966). The theory postulates that every individual has three kinds of orientations to interpersonal behavior: inclusion, control, and affection, and that within these areas individuals have differing needs with respect to how they behave toward others (expressed behavior) and how they themselves want others to behave toward them (wanted behavior). The Heartsmart Adventures program

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attempts to provide opportunities for children that will enhance their abilities to recognize, identify, and express feelings in these areas, as well as to act affirmatively to accomplish what they want from others in these areas.

The field test version of the program consisted of twenty-four tape-led lessons which used a dramatized story to present the concepts of the program, and six teacher-led Heart-to-Heart Talks which gave students opportunities to relate the concepts presented on the tapes to their own experiences. During the taped lessons the pupils colored in cartoon books which paralleled the dramatized stories and participated in pencil and paper activities. The Heart-to-Heart Talks were conducted less formally, with the pupils usually clustered around the teacher as he or she presented a series of "mainpoints" which summarized the concepts of the previous six taped lessons.

Methods

Study Design. The Heartsmart Adventures program was field tested for the final time during the spring semester of 1977. The purpose of the field test was twofold. It was to yield summative data that would reflect the effectiveness of the program in accomplishing its stated objectives, and it was to provide formative data that would guide the revisions of the program by yielding information on appeal and acceptability. Since the formative data were the most useful in delineating the problem areas to be discussed, primary emphasis has been placed on this aspect of the evaluation.

Instrumentation. Data were derived from many sources. Teachers and students completed questionnaires after each tape-led lesson and Heart-to-Heart Talk. Teachers were also asked to complete questionnaires after each unit and at the completion of the program. In addition, both teachers and students were interviewed at the end of the program to allow them to

comment on the program more elaborately. Regular and frequent observations of the program were also conducted. These observation periods also enabled the observer to solicit comments from the teachers on an on-going basis.

Sample. Approximatley 400 fourth grade pupils and 14 teachers from seven elementary schools in a large metropolitan area participated in the field test in experimental and control classes. However, since the instruments used for formative evaluation purposes were only applicable to the experimental classes, the sample size for the results reported on in this paper is approximately 200 students and 7 teachers. Three schools were located in inner-city and suburban neighborhoods of low SES. Two other schools may be classified as middle SES, one as middle- to upper-middle SES, and the remaining school as being characterized by a wide range of SES. The sample was intended to reflect a diversity of school populations but not necessarily a truly representative regional or nation-wide sample. Approximately one half of the students was Black. Two of the seven experimental teachers were Black; five were White. All teachers were female.

Results

Analysis of the formative evaluation data yielded a great deal of information about the appeal and acceptability of the program for both teachers and students. Specifically relevant to this paper, however, was the identification of three problem areas perceived to be important because of their direct or indirect influence on the effectiveness of the program as a whole. These problem areas are discussed here.

Misinterpretation of program objectives. Of the seven field test teachers, two demonstrated by their behavior that they had misinterpreted the program objectives as stated. Two other teachers appeared to have been somewhat confused by the objectives. In most cases, this confusion

and misinterpretation related to the overall objectives and goals of the program, or some major part of the program such as the Heart-to-Heart Talks, rather than to the lesson-specific objectives. Teachers compensated by formulating their own interpretations of and/or by ignoring the stated objectives.

For example, one of the key objectives of the program stated that children should learn to openly express feelings. One teacher, however, appeared to interpret this objective to mean that children should learn to express only positive, i.e., "socially nice," feelings and, to a large extent, did not try to help the children express feelings commonly perceived as negative, such as anger. The students in this class reported that The Heartsmart Adventures had taught them "to be friendly" and "to say nice things to their classmates." On the other hand, another of the field test teachers modified the same objective in such a way that the students were encouraged to describe personal problem situations (e.g., with parents) in which they had expressed feelings successfully, i.e., achieving what they wanted, or unsuccessfully, i.e., failing to achieve what they wanted. In this classroom, the Heart-to-Heart Talks developed into situations resembling sensitivity sessions. On one occasion, the students reacted very strongly to the program, or rather the teacher's version of the program, and stated that they no longer wanted to talk so intensely about their problems. An attempt was make to respond to the children's request, but only temporarily changed the climate of the Heart-to-Heart Talks.

Role Confusion. In some ways this problem area is related to the first, since a clear understanding of the program's objectives by the teachers probably would have alleviated some of the role confusion that occured.

The desirable role for the teachers to have assumed during the field

test was that of facilitator. In this capacity, teachers were to support the acquisition of the program's concepts by guiding student discussion, clarifying concepts whenever necessary, and helping students to apply the concepts presented in the program to their own experiences by example setting, and by maintaining a warm, non-threatening environment for the expression of feelings. Although most field test teachers assumed the role of facilitator some of the time, only two consistently exhibited the behaviors that were appropriate to such a role. To compensate for their lack of understanding or awareness of the proper role, teachers adopted roles for which they did not entirely have the expertise and/or which were not consistent with program intentions.

It was during the Heart-to-Heart Talks that the greatest variation in teacher role behavior was noted. One teacher, for example, changed her role very little from that which she assumed when teaching a cognitive curriculum and, for the most part, taught the concepts of the talks as if they were axioms to be memorized rather than as concepts to be discussed and related to personal experiences. At the other extreme, another teacher functioned in some ways as a clinical psychologist or as a therapist, attempting to solve the students' personal problems. Still another teacher assumed the role of a passive baby-sitter, listening to the students' comments yet not facilitating discussion or application of concepts. None of these roles was desirable from a program perspective.

Socio-emotional conflict. This problem refers to the conflict that existed between the concepts and behaviors espoused by the program and the behaviors that were normative in the social environment outside of the classroom. Socio-emotional conflict was observed in all classes and appeared to be stronger or more serious for Black students from low SES neighborhoods

than for students from other racial/ethnic backgrounds. For example, a statement made by a student to a teacher such as "I feel sad when you don't pay attention to me, and right now I feel mad at you because you did not put my picture on the wall," would be consistent with program intentions and, in fact, quite desirable. In most cases, Heartsmart teachers would have reacted positively to such a statement. However, such statements made by Heartsmart students to adults or children outside of the classroom who were unfamiliar with the program's concepts and objectives, at times, did not lead to desirable reactions.

Discussion

Presented in this section are discussions of (1) the probable causal factors for the problem areas, (2) the solution strategies employed to help eliminate these factors, and (3) the implication of these findings for affective education, with suggestions for further study.

Causal factors. Since the three problems described in the paper were unanticipated, it was not possible to definitively identify direct causes. Inferences, however, could be made. Three factors probably contributed to the presence of the problematic areas during the field test.

First, the written materials designed for the teachers' use, primarily in the form of a teacher's manual, lacked some clarity and specificity. Descriptions of the program's objectives were, at times, ambiguous and unclear. The discussion of the program's theoretical perspective and rationale was also brief and seemed to serve inadequately as a guiding framework by which teachers could assess their interpretations of objectives and their behaviors. Relatedly, there was little explanation given of the meaning of affective education. In addition, teacher's manual materials were somewhat disorganized. Thus, it may be inferred that omissions of

some relevant explanations, lack of clarity, and organizational problems contributed to the field test teachers' misinterpretation of objectives and to their role confusion.

Secondly, the nature, amount, and quality of training given to teachers seemed to be inadequate. Only one teacher training session was conducted for the program. This was a one-day training session attended by all the field test teachers and some school administrators three weeks before the beginning of the field test. Analysis of the responses given to evaluation questionnaire items by the participants at the end of the training session indicated that they felt a moderate to high degree of confidence in their understanding of all the program components with the exception of the Heart-to-Heart Talks, for which their average degree of confidence was relatively low. Discussion during the training session indicated that some teachers had reservations about the appropriateness or acceptability of some of the program's objectives. It would appear that teachers would have profited from more training sessions in which objectives and roles, particularly with respect to the Heart-to-Heart Talks, could have been clarified.

Thirdly, the program did not include sufficient guidelines and activities for the involvement of parents and teachers with whom the students came in contact outside of the Heartsmart classroom.

The procedure of "Informed Parental Consent" was used for the field test. All parents received a fifteen page description of the program and were asked to sign a consent form if they permitted their children to participate. (Only one pair of parents refused to give consent.) At the teacher training session teachers were told that parents should be welcome to observe lessons if they wished, and if such observation was in accordance

with school policy. No parents asked to observe lessons. Some teachers, on their own initiative, discussed the program and its impact on the students during the usual report card conferences.

Since a relatively large number of students experienced socio-emotional conflict, it may be argued that their problems could have been alleviated if more face-to-face discussion among parents and teachers had been mandated by the program. Also, some peer problems or clashes with other school staff members may have been alleviated if these individuals had been prompted to become familiar with the program and its concepts.

Solution strategies for problem areas. Changes made to The Heartsmart Adventures program are described in detail in Coan, et al. (1977). The solution strategies employed in an attempt to alleviate or eliminate the sources of the problems and the resultant changes made to the program are described here only in general terms.

Most of the changes made in response to the problem areas were to the field test version of the teacher's manual. The manual materials were made more attractive and easier to read, and were reorganized so that information about individual program components was found in one section rather than throughout the entire manual. Lesson-specific objective statements were made clearer and phrased in more behavioral terms. Major program goal statements were stated less ambiguously and in terms more readily understandable by someone quickly needing to grasp their meaning. An explanation was offered with respect to the program's rationale and theoretical bases. Some attempt was also made to define affective education in relation to the program's goals. To help alleviate future role confusion, a lengthy section was added defining the appropriate role specifications for program teachers to adhere to, especially during the Heart-to-Heart Talks.

In addition, guidelines for conducting three workshops were also added to the teacher's manual. The first is a self-training workshop to be used by teachers within a school who are planning to teach the program, with the help of the principal. It is intended to introduce the teachers to the program's concepts and objectives. The second workshop is to be conducted about halfway through the program by the principal and program teachers and is designed to inform parents about the program. The third workshop is to be conducted by teachers and is intended to facilitate collaboration between teachers and parents in determining the success of the program, and how any successful outcomes may be fostered and continued in the future.

Implications. Although the field test described in part in this paper is only an isolated experience, the findings may have meaning for other attempts to develop, evaluate, and implement affective education programs. For one, the findings suggest that developers of affective programs should be very concerned with carefully defining objectives and appropriate roles. Furthermore, they should try to incorporate within the programs opportunities in which parents and other relevant individuals can be made aware of the concepts and intentions of the program. Relatedly, evaluators of affective education programs should become aware of the types of problems discovered during this field test, and perhaps begin to address such issues when constructing field test designs, and selecting and developing evaluation instruments. Finally, implementers of affective programs should also become aware of such problems when integrating these programs into existing curricula, and attempt to facilitate teacher training procedures and parental involvement.

In addition, it is suggested here that the presence of these types

of problems within affective curricula may be potentially more harmful than their presence within cognitive curricula, given that children's psychological rather than cognitive states are being dealt with and that many teachers lack experience in teaching affective concepts. It would seem that investigations into the presence and nature of the types of problems defined in this field test in other evaluation efforts of affective curricula in contrast, perhaps, to cognitive curricula, would be profitable to all individuals interested in improving attempts to systematically teach affective skills in classrooms.

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